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SUBJECT: THIS WEEK IN ALBANIA, FEBRUARY 2-8, 2008

¶11. (U) The following is a weekly report prepared by Embassy Tirana's local staff to provide political and economic context and insight into developments in Albania. These updates will supplement post's DAR reports and reporting cables.

POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

¶12. (U) "RODNEY KING" LIVES ON (LESS VIOLENTLY) IN ALBANIA: Albanian police are caught in a scandal familiar to the American public -- caught on videotape abusing their position. Two videos taken by local citizens surfaced on the popular television program "Fiks Fare," a satirical investigative television journal, showing police officers abusing citizens. One traffic cop hit an offender over the head with his hand-held traffic-directing sign, dismissing protests of the bleeding victim (a recent emigrant returning from the UK) with "Take your papers and leave." The second tape involved a new officer who cursed and challenged two men to a duel when they protested a parking ticket.

¶13. (U) Despite substantial recent efforts by the government and international community to improve police training, technology caught these officers in action. Authorities reacted promptly, arresting one and suspending all others involved in the two incidents. The police spokesperson called publicly on citizens to report cases of police misconduct and vowed to take similarly firm action in the future. However, some note that the public's preference to pass information such as these video tapes to the media rather than official outlets (such as the 24-hour hotlines against corruption and abuse operated by the police and the Prime Minister's office, or the police internal investigative service) shows a continuing lack of trust in public institutions. When the media presents such evidence widely and publicly, action is usually taken swiftly to counter the charges. However, outside the glare of the cameras, citizens often fear further corruption or abuse against the accuser.

¶14. (U) MYTHS, LIES, AND CONSPIRACY: In Albanian society and politics there are always a few conspiracy theories ruminating around the edges. These myths, spread through the many and opinionated recognized media outlets, as well as by word of mouth, thrive in post-communist society.

¶15. (U) Media, however, is the main perpetrator of the conspiracy theories, some which prove to be true, such as the rumored collapse of the pyramid schemes in 1997, while others remain unsubstantiated. The most famous involve major figures: George Soros' "real agenda" for Albania; Edi Rama's colorful past in Paris; and political or financial alliances between the major political actors. Last summer's presidential elections sparked the well-known theory that arch rivals Sali Berisha and Fatos Nano had a pact to elect the latter as president so that the former could retain the Prime

Ministry. The most current iteration of this is a supposed pact between opposition leader Edi Rama and Prime Minister Berisha to divide up and maintain separate spheres of influence in return for a public truce.

¶6. (U) Major political actors often influence the media outlets that defend their particular political persuasion to direct and hold public attention, and conspiracy theorists would argue their real goal is to deflect the public from the most pressing issues. With a wide range of publications, each using facts and rumor to support the views of its major stakeholders, the media represents the spectrum of biases. News in Albania can often be opinion supported by fact, rather than the other way around, the perfect environment for conspiracy theories to flourish.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENTS

¶7. (U) ACTION ON IPR VIOLATIONS: The government's Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) Office announced a strong new campaign against pirated materials this week. In unannounced inspections across Tirana, the government confiscated thousands of illegal DVDs and CDs and fined the violating sellers \$100 (the maximum provided by law). The action is part of a country-wide plan to raise awareness of property rights and to force vendors to register their products with the IPR Office. In the coming months the office intends to take legal action against offenders in a joint effort of police and customs authorities.

¶8. (U) Albanian law protects copyrights, patents, trademarks, stamps, marks of origin, and industrial designs. In 2003, the GOA passed an anti-piracy law, which required television stations to broadcast only those shows and movies which they had legally licensed for broadcast. Unfortunately, enforcement remains

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incomplete and violations of copyright, trademark, and other intellectual property rights are still common. Pirated copies of DVDs and CDs, imported from other countries, are readily available for purchase and rental across the country. The government's new campaign against violators will be a welcome effort to improve implementation of existing laws.

ARTS AND CULTURE

¶9. (U) PORTRAIT OF AN ARTIST: TEDI PAPAVRAMI: Tedi Papavrami is Albania's famous child prodigy. He began study of the violin at age four with his father, Robert Papavrami, a renowned violin teacher. At eight he performed Sarasate's "Airs Bohemiens" with the Tirana Philharmonic Orchestra and three years later the First Violin Concerto by Nicolo Paganini.

¶10. (U) In 1982 he received a scholarship from the French government to study at the French conservatory, a rare and unparalleled opportunity during communist times. Papavrami went on to perform throughout Europe, Asia, South Africa and Israel with major orchestras. In a tour of Japan he performed the lengthy and intricate "24 Caprices," considered one of the most difficult pieces written for solo violin. Papavrami is one of the few artists to play the 24 consecutive "capricios" in concert. In addition, he is acclaimed for his interpretation of the complete Bach Sonatas and Partitas, presented in concert near Paris. Papavrami plays a violin custom made by Christian Bayon.

¶11. (U) A versatile artist, Papavrami acted opposite Catherine Deneuve, Natassja Kinsky and other stars in the French TV film "Les Liaisons Dangereuses." His talents also include exceptional linguistic abilities; he is Fayard Publishing's official translator of the works of the lyrical Albanian novelist Ismail Kadare.

¶12. (U) QUOTE OF THE WEEK: "Stop this nonsense. I am in Greece seeking the return of the stolen sculptures to Albania. This is what should concern you. This is the newsworthy item." Minister of

Culture, Ylli Pango, responding to a journalist's inquiry as to why his 17-year-old son drives his father's official Volkswagen Touareg every day to school.

WITHERS